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SUBJECT: ANTANANARIVO UPDATE: MADAGASCAR'S "NEW OPPOSITION" FIGHTS
ON

11. SUMMARY: This is U.S. Embassy Antananarivo's Weekly Update for the week of March 30 to April 3, an unclassified review of major events and information from the U.S. mission to Madagascar and the Comoros. The last two weeks in Madagascar have been dominated by ongoing demonstrations, while Andry Rajoelina continues naming the members of his "High Transitional Authority" and government and presses ahead with an unpopular and nonconsensual "National Meeting" of political parties and civil society. Comoros' response to the March 29 referendum on Mayotte was muted, but dialogue on a constitutional referendum on President Sambi's mandate continues between the Union government and the opposition. END SUMMARY

MADAGASCAR: LAST MONTH'S GOVERNMENT, THIS MONTH'S OPPOSITION

12. DAILY STREET DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUE: Madagascar's "new opposition", composed of members and supporters of the former government and the TIM party as well as opponents of Andry Rajoelina's unconstitutional rise to power, have held daily protests in Democracy Square (at Ambohitatovo Park) and Place de 13 Mai. Encouraged from abroad by former president Marc Ravalomanana, the demonstrators are calling for the reinstatement of Parliament, the return of Ravalomanana, and the resignation of Rajoelina. For two weeks now, demonstrations have lasted two to three hours before disintegrating into fist fights and stone-throwing with supporters of Rajoelina's "High Transitional Authority" (HAT), and then being broken up with tear gas and gunfire. The protests are generally contained to downtown Tana, and have not translated into widespread violence or looting.

13. FILLING THE HAT: Rajoelina has named 41 of the 44 members of the HAT, who will serve an advisory role for the duration of the transition government; most are close allies from the past three months, and only two were affiliated with the former government (many more neutral candidates privately claim to have declined the invitation to join). At time of writing, he had not yet named the remaining 10 to 15 ministers that will fill out his cabinet, including, notably, a Minister of Defense; there appears to be no consensus within the military on a suitable candidate. On March 31, HAT Prime Minister Roindefo Monja convened the diplomatic corps to discuss their priorities for the transition period, but the response was underwhelming: no Ambassadors attended, and none of the representatives present engaged with the HAT. Minister of Finance Benja Razafimahaleo listed food security, internal security, good governance, stabilization of public finances, and the creation of new institutions of state as HAT priorities for the next two years.

14. NATIONAL MEETING LAUNCHED: The HAT launched its National Meeting ("Assises Nationales") on April 2 to discuss government during the transition period, develop a plan for rewriting the country's laws, and determine a calendar for new elections within 24 months. In addition, they will likely determine the composition of the Council for Economic and Social Recovery (a 120-member body that essentially replaces parliament). As the HAT already determined the structure of the transition government, and outlined the five previously-mentioned priorities, the National Meeting is left with a fairly limited agenda - and only two days to accomplish it (see next).

15. ...BUT OPPOSITION (AND MOST DIPLOMATS) DECLINE INVITATION: Ravalomanana's political party, TIM, has boycotted the National Meeting, along with a large group of civil society organizations (the CCOC) and several members of the "old opposition", notably former president Albert Zafy, who has been left out of the transition government altogether - reportedly at his own request. (As noted below, Zafy was an early critic of the HAT and its president's "self-proclamation", so his refusal to participate should not have come as a surprise.) TIM has announced a competing "National Consultation" for April 3 to "restore legality and democracy in Madagascar", while the civil society group is planning a "National Convention" for later in the month that will purportedly start from scratch to design new institutions and procedures for the transition government. Zafy's "old-opposition" organization, the Council for National Reconciliation (CRN), opposes the way that the HAT was set up, and will instead support the creation of six autonomous provinces based on the country's pre-2007 administrative system. Despite three separate forces (and counting) opposing the HAT, Rajoelina appears determined to stay the course. Only a few ambassadors, all from Africa, attended the opening ceremony, along with - and apparently encouraged by -- the visiting AU Special Envoy Ablasse Ouedraogo. UN Senior Mediator Tiebille Drame returned to Tana today but also boycotted the opening.

16. TGV HITS THE ROAD: For the first time since the crisis began in January, Rajoelina left the capital to test the provincial waters; thus far, the response has been positive, although a slew of populist measures have ensured support at each turn. In Moramanga on Sunday, he announced a pension increase, as well as subsidies on rice, oil, and bread. He then visited Fianarantsoa with former mayor (and recently-released political prisoner) Pety Rakotoniaina,

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to announce Rakotoniaina's installation as de facto mayor (PDS) of the city, along with the previously mentioned food subsidies. On Wednesday, he joined HAT PM Monja in Tulear, where a reported 50,000 people attended a rally for their native son. (Monja is a son of Tulear, and the first PM from the region.) Cheap rice and oil was once again on offer, as well as a 25% reduction in public transportation fares - at the expense of the transportation companies themselves.

17. MINING OPERATORS UNDER SCRUTINY: Rajoelina has announced that mining contracts will be frozen, in order to "ensure greater revenues from drilling and extraction rights". While denying that the government planned to cancel these projects, the HAT asserted that previous contracts simply weren't done according to the law. In an allegedly separate incident, the offices of QMM, a Canadian mining company operating near Fort Dauphine, were searched by the military for weapons and/or mercenaries; local authorities have also reportedly requested a complete list of QMM expatriate staff for the same reason.

FOOD AID AND DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

18. U.S. STEPS IN TO EASE FOOD CRISIS: Ambassador Marquardt and French Ambassador Jean-Marc Chataigner jointly visited Ambovombe, Berenty, and Toliary, in southwestern Madagascar, along with the USAID Director and French development colleagues and journalists. The trip was intended to highlight the region's food insecurity among vulnerable Malagasy populations, the international community's continuing engagement there, and to launch a USD \$50,000 initial USG response effort in tandem with UN agencies and NGOs. The visit was widely, and favorably, reported on in the Malagasy press.

19. JIM CARREY'S "BETTER U" SUPPORTS MCC-INITIATED PROJECT: Agricultural and Business Centers (ABC's) Attracting Outside Attention: The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) effort to reduce poverty through the creation of locally operated ABC's in rural Madagascar has attracted the attention of actor Jim Carrey's Better U Foundation. The ABCs provide appropriate technical and managerial assistance to local farmers and small, medium and large business ventures. To help them expand their operations, the Better U Foundation has made a grant to two of the ABCs (in the regions of

Boeny and Diana) to increase the scale of their System of Rice Intensification (SRI) dissemination efforts. SRI is a rice production methodology that was developed in Madagascar that does not rely on expensive external inputs (machinery, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides), and significantly increase yields (2-3 times the national average). In a land where rice is consumed three times a day, this effort will go along way to reduce hunger and rural poverty. This is in follow-up to Carrey's August 2008 visit to Madagascar.

COMOROS

¶10. MAYOTTE VOTES: The Mayotte referendum passed with 95% in favor of becoming a Department. The reaction in the Comoros was muted, a few hundred peaceful protestors. In Doha the week afterward, President Sambu obtained the support of the Arab League to criticize France over Mayotte, defending the Comoros' claim on the island.

¶11. EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE FROM THE ARAB LEAGUE: Also in Doha, the Arab League pledged USD 24 million in emergency assistance to the Comoros for a period of one year. Projects to be funded will be identified. The media reported that Ethiopia and Sudan also received similar Arab League pledges.

¶12. SAMBU'S CONSTITUTIONAL GAMBIT: Negotiations between the Union Government and opposition continue about the expected constitutional referendum, in particular to address President Sambu's intention to extend his mandate one year to 2010. President Sambu met for four hours March 23 with the three island presidents (Grande Comore Abdouwahabi, Moheli Ali Said, Anjouan, Moussa Toybou) to discuss the Inter-Comoran Dialogue and the proposed constitutional referendum. Opposition leaders Abdouwahab and Ali Said presented a proposal for Sambu to step down in 2010 and rework the electoral calendar in order to harmonize elections. President Sambu maintains he will either 1) step down in 2010 if ALL island presidents shorten their mandates to do the same OR 2) seek to prolong his mandate to 2011. TZ President Kikwete's timely visit offered the opportunity for the AU to encourage consensus. While the sides remain far apart, Sambu agreed for his Cabinet Director Dossar to meet again Saturday with the four island executives to seek a solution. The President departed March 27 for a week in Doha, and will review their work when he returns -- and probably announce a new date for his referendum as well as releasing a new revised text.

¶13. VIOLENCE ON GRANDE COMORE: Inter-village conflict between Iconi and Moroni ended last week; Comoran military remain in force on the street to prevent a return to violence. Union, city, and local

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officials, as well as tradition "Notables," have been active in negotiating a truce over this land dispute and reached a tentative agreement to resolve the issue in order to prevent further violence.

Street violence broke out in Moroni March 24 as villagers from Iconi (southern edge of Moroni) and inhabitants of Moroni fought gang battles over a land rights dispute. An unknown number of people were injured, some seriously. After 36 hours of young men brandishing machetes, pipes and rocks -- stopping cars to/from Iconi -- the military stepped in March 25 to maintain order. The reported source of the conflict is a land dispute decision by a "corrupt" judge that went against Iconi, whose citizens attacked Moroni and then were counter-attacked by young men from Moroni. Iconi merchants in the Moroni central volo-volo market were expelled and some of their stalls were burned. Island president and opposition leader Abdouwahabi is from Iconi, and last Friday he prevented President Sambu from attending prayers there. It is unclear to what extent the fighting over this land dispute may be connected to the bigger political picture. Comoros Officer has been in constant contact with CJTF-HOA personnel to share information and keep USG people out of harm's way. Foreigners have not been targeted.

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